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Witchcraft and Psychotherapy

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Belief in witchcraft, which serves a variety of social functions and personal defences, is bound to emerge in psychotherapy with individuals from a culture that holds such beliefs; endeavouring to understand it can open up new therapeutic possibilities. The nature of witchcraft, the profiles with which it intrudes into therapy, and the socio-psychological functions it fulfills are considered. Referring such patients to witchdoctors is morally unjustifiable, but the witchdoctor's folk-image provides a floating transference, around which the therapeutic relationship can be built. In dealing with witchcraft-ideation, understanding is based as much on cultural as on personal empathy, and to enhance its relevance, therapy may appropriate some of the functional dynamics of the witchcraft system into its own therapeutic manoeuvres.